United Nations A/AC.96/SR.685

General Assembly

Distr.: General
7 October 2015

Original: English

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Sixty-sixth session

Summary record of the 685th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 5 October 2015, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Comissário

Contents

Statement by the High Commissioner and general debate (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of the present document* to the English Translation Section, room E.6040, Palais des Nations, Geneva (trad_sec_eng@unog.ch)

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Executive Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.15-17250 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Statement by the High Commissioner and general debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Alemi Balkhi** (Afghanistan) said that, with the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), some 6 million Afghan refugees had returned to Afghanistan in the past 13 years. Yet, millions were still living outside the country, either as registered refugees or as asylum seekers. Admittedly, the Afghan Government had not paid enough attention in recent years to issues concerning refugees and asylum seekers — particularly their voluntary repatriation — but it had since decided to do so as a matter of national priority, setting up various important agencies for that purpose. The Government's newly established return and reintegration strategy affirmed the fundamental right of all Afghans to resettle in any area of the country they wished, and the needs of returnees were included in national priority programmes. So far in 2015, more than 55,000 registered Afghans had returned from Iran and Pakistan, and 80,000 unregistered Afghans had returned voluntarily. Until such time as the Government was able to bring each of those figures up to 100,000, it was requesting an end to forced deportations and an increase in the registration of undocumented Afghans as first steps towards their voluntary and sustainable return home. It was also requesting the continued assistance of the international community for the voluntary and gradual repatriation and the sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees, especially those in Iran and Pakistan, in keeping with the nation's absorption capacity.

2. The events of the past week in Kunduz had resulted in the internal displacement of some 170,000 persons, whose number was added to the more than 220,000 who had flowed into the provinces of Khost, Paktika, Kunar and Nangarhar in the past two years, thereby bringing the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to 1 million. The Government planned to resolve its internal displacement problem completely within the next five years, but it would not be able to do so without the cooperation of the international community.

3. The recent massive influx of refugees and migrants into European countries reflected a need of human society, which must be addressed appropriately. In order to manage the current crisis, and reverse its tide, consideration should be given to the following four actions: recognizing all asylum seekers who had reached their destination, without discrimination; finding better ways to manage and facilitate economic migration between countries of origin and those in need of labour migrants; helping to create better employment opportunities to prevent irregular migration; and taking decisive action to counter organized human and migrant smuggling networks. In keeping with the obligations of Afghanistan under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the Government was preparing draft legislation relating to refugees.

4. **Princess Tsandzile Dlamini** (Observer for Swaziland) said that the open-door policy that her country had historically maintained towards the reception and acceptance of asylum seekers had encouraged an unrestricted influx of such persons, both from the surrounding region as well as from regions beyond it. Despite its limited resources, the Swazi Government remained committed to managing, protecting and providing for refugees in accordance with international law and practice. It had injected both human and financial resources into improving refugee protection, and despite the country's saturated labour market, it had employed a number of refugees in various professional and technical fields.

5. In collaboration with UNHCR, her Government had facilitated the review and approval of a refugee bill; implemented refugee protection, integration and self-reliance programmes; established an early childhood care and development facility at

the Malindza Refugee Reception Centre; and provided primary education to all refugee children.

6. As long as the world was faced with the politicization of ethnicity, power struggles and insoluble sociopolitical problems, the volume of asylum seekers and displaced persons was bound to increase. In view of the fact that receiving and hosting refugees tended to be a long-term proposition, Swaziland wished to request continued support from the international community.

7. **Mr. Konaté** (Observer for Mali) said that since January 2012, his country had experienced mass displacements of its population, both internally and towards the neighbouring countries of Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania. The Government had recently signed a peace agreement, which brought an end to the conflict among the various warring factions in the country, and had reiterated its commitment to cooperating with UNHCR for the return and social and economic rehabilitation of all Malians. Twenty-five per cent of those who had fled the country had returned; however, that still left the country with the task of facilitating the return of the remaining 75 per cent.

8. Despite that situation, for the past 25 years, Mali had hosted some 12,000 Mauritanian refugees — mainly in the Kayes Region of the country — who continued to benefit from the hospitality and generosity of the Malian people and the protection of the Malian Government. At the Ministerial Conference on Statelessness in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Region, held in February 2015, Mali had undertaken to become a party to two international conventions on statelessness and to the naturalization of refugees who requested it. It had subsequently naturalized 6,530 Mauritanian refugees.

9. Moreover, following the signing of the peace agreements, his Government had concluded tripartite agreements with concerned States and ECOWAS in order to facilitate the return of Malians who had fled the country. Mali would need support from the international community to facilitate the dignified return of its nationals. Their return would attest to the end of the conflict and the return to normality.

10. **Mr. Alghunaim** (Observer for Kuwait) said that, despite its small size and population, Kuwait played a leading role internationally in terms of its generous financial support to UNHCR. In order to resolve pressing humanitarian issues, the international community must forge strategic partnerships and provide urgent humanitarian aid, doing so without political motives. His Government wished to call on other States that had not already done so to share the burden of protecting refugees by fulfilling their financial commitments to UNHCR.

11. **Mr. Kgathi** (Observer for Botswana) said that he shared the position of the European Commission in its European Agenda on Migration, which stated that no member State could effectively address migration on its own. That statement should be expanded in order to acknowledge that migration was a global problem that required a global response.

12. In 1969, Botswana had become a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, and had incorporated the principles of those international instruments into its national law and practice. In the early 1960s and 1970s, it had received and provided protection to refugees during the liberation struggles of the present-day countries of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola and Mozambique. It was proud of the fact that the majority of those refugees had enjoyed access to health care and other social services, including education up to tertiary or university level. Since the 1980s, the member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) had worked towards ensuring peace and security in the region, meeting annually to resolve possible

conflict situations and cooperating in matters of defence and security. It was in that context that Botswana could conclusively assert that peace and security reigned in the SADC region.

13. On 3 March 2015, the Government had announced its decision to apply the cessation clause in respect of refugees from the Zambezi Region of Namibia, which would take effect beginning on 31 December 2015. However, there was currently a new wave of migration, which, if not contained, could upset the peace and stability of the region. Botswana should take a leaf from the position of the European Commission on burden sharing in order urgently to develop better policies and tools to address that problem in a balanced and equitable manner.

14. **Ms. Yarafa** (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that, since the end of 2012, her country had experienced a variety of crises that had resulted in the internal displacement of nearly 100,000 Central Africans and in the flight of nearly half as many Central African asylum seekers to neighbouring countries. In August 2015, and with the support of the international community, that situation had improved somewhat, bringing the number of IDPs down by two thirds, although the number of Central African asylum seekers remained the same. Unfortunately, another very recent crisis in September 2015 had resulted in 30,000 new displaced persons. She therefore wished to make an urgent plea to the international community to increase its support to the Central African Republic in order to facilitate the reconstruction of housing for returnees and their social reintegration, as well as the incorporation into national law of the relevant regional and international instruments that her country had ratified.

15. **Mr. Kussuma** (Observer for Angola) said that nearly 5 million Angolans had been displaced internally or exiled in recent years because of armed conflict. In September, the Government had begun the last voluntary repatriation operations for former Angolan refugees who were in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. Between 2003 and September 2015, nearly 525,000 Angolan citizens had been repatriated, including 58 per cent from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 37 per cent from Zambia, 4 per cent from Namibia and 1 per cent from other countries.

16. Some 40,000 Angolans had opted to remain in asylum countries, for the most part Zambia and Democratic Republic of the Congo, taking advantage of local integration opportunities. The Government of Angola was committed to ensuring that the relevant personal identification documents were issued so that their situation could be regularized. He was grateful to the host countries that had welcomed Angolans for decades despite domestic difficulties.

17. For its part, the Government was investing significant human and financial resources in the repatriation process. Furthermore, it had recently approved a law on the right of asylum and the status of refugees, in keeping with the international conventions. It was aware of the problems that affected refugees throughout the world and of the need for dialogue, respect for human dignity and coordinated efforts to combat that scourge.

18. **Mr. Dauda** (Observer for Sierra Leone) said that the Government was deeply committed to providing international protection of refugees. To that end, it had granted residence permits to all locally integrated Liberian refugees issued with passports. It had completed reviewing the remaining refugee cases in the country in collaboration with UNHCR and expected to have the results shortly. With a view to ensuring that asylum procedures were fair, efficient and transparent, the Government had drafted a bill to amend the Refugee Protection Act, with technical support from UNHCR, which was currently before the parliament for consideration.

19. The Cabinet had recently given its approval to the two statelessness conventions and lobbying efforts were under way for the ratification of the instruments by the

parliament. He urged UNHCR to continue its financial, logistical and technical support to help build the Government's capacity to deal with refugee situations and statelessness.

20. Sierra Leone was among the countries most affected by the Ebola outbreak. The outbreak had caused delays in the implementation of some planned activities, including ratification of the statelessness conventions, amendments to the Refugee Protection Act and a durable solution for Liberians seeking asylum in Sierra Leone, whose applications had been rejected (red-coded) during the passport vetting missions undertaken by the Government of Liberia. Lastly, the Government looked forward to further work with UNHCR to ensure a legal environment conducive to the protection of persons of concern.

21. **Ms. Mondlane** (Mozambique) said that the current session was significant for three reasons: it came one week after the adoption of the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015; the international community was witnessing an unprecedented mixed movement of refugees and migrants; and conflict was forcing more and more people to seek refuge and safety elsewhere.

22. Funding for UNHCR emergency appeals for Africa had fallen short by 30 per cent of the estimated requirements and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-2016 in response to the Syrian crisis by some 70 per cent. Durable solutions had almost stalled and the number of refugees who had been able to return to their home countries in 2014 had declined sharply, to just under 127,000 persons, the lowest number in three decades.

23. Protracted conflicts had meant that people remained on the move and more and more refugees sought safety by undertaking dangerous sea journeys, including in the Mediterranean, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and the seas in Southeast Asia. Her delegation was greatly concerned about the food ration cuts for refugees in Africa. It therefore welcomed the food security campaign undertaken by UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) and encouraged UNHCR and its partners in its efforts to identify new sources of funding as they endeavoured to ensure that refugees lived in safety and dignity.

24. **Ms. Chohan** (South Africa) said that national law made provision for individual claims for asylum in South Africa. Asylum seekers enjoyed freedom of movement, employment and education opportunities, as well as access to a range of social services, including housing. Between 2008 and 2012, South Africa had dealt with the highest number of applications for asylum in the world and had received on average 150,000 new applications per year. South Africa was a country, not a continent. Her delegation was therefore somewhat bemused that the European Union, which consisted of 28 countries, was experiencing a refugee crisis on account of the arrival of 380,000 refugees in the current year.

25. The Government had granted 250,000 work visas to Zimbabweans, many of whom used the asylum regime to take advantage of economic opportunities. Such Government efforts were not necessarily popular among South African citizens. Nevertheless, leaders must lead and light the way towards a more caring world. That was the legacy of Nelson Mandela and his comrades, who had been incarcerated on Robben Island for most of their lifetimes.

26. African countries hosted almost 4 million refugees and over 11 million internally displaced persons, many of whom had found their way to South Africa. European countries were currently experiencing the consequences of decades of war and deliberate destabilization in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic.

27. Noting the recent inauguration of a monument to Nelson Mandela which stood just opposite UNHCR headquarters, she said that the late President of South Africa had spared no personal effort to prevent the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and had called on former President George H.W. Bush to intervene with his fatherly wisdom when the former's calls to then-President George W. Bush had fallen on deaf ears. He had done so in a desperate effort to avert the interminable suffering of millions.

28. Regime change at all costs in the name of democracy continued to deprive humanity of peace and millions of the right to human dignity and an equal opportunity to prosper. The international community should not be surprised that the refugee crisis was now in its backyards, whether in Southern Africa or Northern Europe. The "haves" continued to dominate the "have-nots", with bleak consequences for all the people of the world. The Nazi Holocaust, Rwandan genocide and the crime of Apartheid had seemingly been forgotten. The world needed to renew its commitment to ensuring that refugees who were fleeing persecution and war were treated with dignity and hospitality.

29. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR would lend its full support to the efforts by the Afghan Government to bring about the sustainable return of internally displaced persons and refugees. He was grateful for the proposals made by the delegation of Afghanistan on refugee and migration management. He commended the open-door and self-reliance policy of Swaziland. UNHCR supported the current review of the refugee bill of Swaziland. He wished also to express his solidarity with the people of Mali at a crucial moment in the country's history. He was pleased that the Government gave priority to the return and social and economic reintegration of Malian refugees. He also commended the Government on its plans to ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. He was deeply grateful for the statement by the delegation of Kuwait and the three donor conferences held there, which were a reflection of the leadership and generosity of the Government and people in the area of refugee protection. UNHCR fully supported the agreement mentioned by the representative of Botswana concerning Namibian refugees.

30. Furthermore, UNHCR was firmly committed to protecting and assisting refugees from the Central African Republic in neighbouring countries and to supporting humanitarian actions within the country. He was aware of the gap between donor commitments and humanitarian requirements, which showed that the world had largely forgotten the crisis in the country. The situation must once again be given priority attention. He thanked the delegation of Angola for the proposals for durable solutions to the situation of Angolan refugees. Sierra Leone had been an exemplary country with its policy of local integration. He commended the Government on the progress made towards ratification of the statelessness conventions. He paid tribute to the Mozambican leader Eduardo Mondlane. He would never forget what he represented to all those who yearned for democracy and the end of colonialism. UNHCR supported the delegation's appeal for further funding and efforts to address food insecurity among refugee populations in Africa. Lastly, he welcomed the appeal for peace and tolerance by the delegation of South Africa. Nelson Mandela was a point of reference for everyone. While he was now physically close to the UNHCR office, he was also close to the hearts of the people working there.

31. **Mr. Vasconcellos** (Brazil) said that Brazil was fully committed to implementation of the Brazil Plan of Action adopted during the Cartagena+30 Ministerial Commemorative Event and had adopted the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. It commended the efforts of those countries that were receiving refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic; it had itself established a programme under which 8,000 Syrian refugees had already been granted visas and the policy had just

been extended for a further two years. True to its long history of receiving flows of migrants from around the world, it had received close to 65,000 Haitians after the 2010 earthquake. Brazil recognized that the successful integration of such persons brought a huge contribution to its development and was thus dismayed that that aspect was not mentioned in the context of the current crisis, while xenophobia and intolerance were sadly very present. More must be done to promote the cherished values of humanity and to remind the world that all people were migrants.

32. **Mr. Wilden** (Australia) said that his Government supported the United Nations process to reform the international humanitarian response architecture. It commended Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt, which continued to bear the brunt of the population of displaced persons. Australia currently provided $230 million in humanitarian assistance to help those most affected by conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. The current mixed flows of refugees and migrants into Europe were a reminder of the need for collective responses. In the absence of such responses, pernicious intermediaries would flourish. Australia's firm response to people smuggling had saved thousands of lives. It had also enabled it to give refuge to those most in need. Australia would resettle an additional 12,000 refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq registered with UNHCR in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The Government had set aside more than $500 million in the coming four years to help those refugees call Australia home, a place where rights were balanced with responsibilities. It was eager to continue its partnership with UNHCR to address the root causes of displacement, support the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance, promote lawful and orderly migration and secure durable solutions for people in need of protection.

33. **Mr. Sirleaf** (Observer for Liberia) said that Liberia had not been able to send a delegation to the previous session of the Executive Committee because of the outbreak of Ebola virus disease, during which UNHCR had provided significant logistic assistance.

34. There were still almost 37,000 Ivorian refugees in Liberia. The Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization were providing training in entrepreneurship and agricultural development for some of them under a programme funded by the Japanese Government. Discussions on the resumption of the voluntary repatriation process had been held with the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, and the Liberian authorities were optimistic that large numbers of refugees would soon be able to return to that country, once the situation became clear. Liberia would welcome the support of the international community in encouraging the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to proceed with resumption of the process. Local authorities and host communities were contributing to the refugees' livelihood through the provision of farm land.

35. Security had been increased in the refugee camps, notably in the run-up to the Ivorian elections, although further funding and logistic support to assist in that effort would be welcome. The contingency plans for refugees from both Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire had recently been updated with the help of UNHCR, and distribution of biometric identification cards was under way. Further assistance from UNHCR would be very useful in terms of capacity-building, database development to assist in providing protection, the provision of machine-readable travel documents and the pending ratification of the Liberia Refugee Act, the National Action Plan on Statelessness and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention).

36. **Mr. Nsie Edang** (Observer for Gabon) said that within the Central African subregion, there was a need for more coordinated cooperation to make migration both legal and safe and to help combat organized transnational crime. The challenge of

managing migratory flows could be met by sharing international experience, both north-south and south-south, but respect for human rights and the principle of non-refoulement was always fundamental, even when asylum seekers came from non-neighbouring countries. In Gabon, the legislation stated that asylum seekers should not be considered as illegal immigrants. However, social pressure in the country was such that, in the current economic climate, international solidarity was more than ever necessary to help improve the conditions in which asylum seekers were received, registered, protected and given help towards voluntary repatriation.

37. **Mr. Martínez** (Ecuador) said that Ecuador hosted the largest number of refugees and displaced persons in Latin America. None of them lived in dedicated camps, but were rather scattered throughout the country, where they enjoyed the same rights as citizens, including free health care and education, the cost of which was borne by the country. Firmly believing that eliminating the causes of the refugee crisis was a primary duty of States Members of the United Nations, Ecuador was working with the Government and democratic forces of Colombia to promote peace in that country, from which the overwhelming majority of the refugees in Ecuador originated.

38. Although Ecuador could not offer financial resources, it could share its experience with the many countries affected by conflicts that led to refugee flows, with the aim of preventing forced irregular entry into a country being made a crime and hence a modern form of discrimination. It supported the recent statement of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants calling on the European Union to establish a human rights-based, coherent and comprehensive migration policy which made mobility its central asset. The use of violence or repression could not prevent migrants and asylum seekers reaching Europe and so countries there should rather establish safe, official humanitarian processes to allow them in and show moral and political leadership by combating racism, xenophobia and hate crimes. Ecuador itself had issued around 25,000 visas to regularize the situation of immigrants, refugees and displaced persons from other South American countries.

39. **Mr. Mohammadifar** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Islamic Republic of Iran had hosted up to 3 million refugees at times over the previous 30 years. There were currently 400,000 children of refugees and asylum seekers in the country's schools and over 40,000 refugees studying in its universities. Despite the lack of adequate assistance from the international community, all refugees, even those with special diseases, benefited from health insurance coverage.

40. Voluntary repatriation was the most appropriate solution to refugee problems, and supporting the Afghan Government in establishing peace, stability and economic prosperity in the country was a priority for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Donor countries needed to recognize the importance of investing in Afghanistan, as providing returning refugees with small amounts of money could not lead to their sustainable reintegration. Resettlement in third countries was another option but only around 1,000 of the 1 million refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2014 had benefited from such programmes. An annual quota for resettlement should be set and particular support offered to vulnerable groups, such as those with special diseases. It was to be hoped that implementation of the outcome of the conferences and steering committee meetings focusing on solutions to the Afghan refugee problem would contribute to reducing the heavy economic and social burden placed on the host countries.

41. The situation around Syria called for support from the international community through the admission of and protection for refugees and migrants, and the search for a political solution to allow their eventual repatriation. The present meeting could help refugees and displaced persons throughout the world by encouraging constructive interaction between donor countries, host countries and countries of origin.

42. **Mr. Çarikçi** (Turkey) said that the international aid system was failing to provide either protection or hope to the millions of displaced persons. However there would be many opportunities during the coming year to discuss its reform, culminating in the first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016. There would therefore be no excuse if the 2016 session of the Executive Committee were not in a position to discuss solutions and action to be taken, rather than only the problems, as at present. While humanitarian workers should not be looking for solutions to political problems or politicizing humanitarian issues, they could bring a humanitarian angle to political issues.

43. Due to the ongoing conflicts, Turkey had become host to the largest number of refugees in the area and was maintaining its open-door policy, at a cost of nearly $8 billion to date, to which the international community had so far contributed only $417 million. Twenty-five temporary protection centres provided accommodation, food, health, education and other services to almost 260,000 Syrian refugees, with another 1.94 million living elsewhere in the country and enjoying free health care. The Turkish coast guard had stepped up its activities in response to the situation and had rescued over 55,000 people since the beginning of 2015, at a cost of €5 million each month. The oft-repeated call for burden-sharing had led Turkey to request the inclusion on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly of an item on irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, focusing on Syrian asylum seekers. While the countries with large refugee communities bore the greatest share of the burden, they were much less well represented on the decision-making structures of UNHCR. A priority of the World Humanitarian Summit would be to increase the solidarity offered to refugees and to refugee-hosting countries.

44. **Ms. Kaji** (Japan) said that Japan, while geographically removed from the region affected by the most recent refugee crisis, wished to help mitigate the plight of the persons concerned and had thus the previous month decided to provide $1 million to UNHCR for its work in Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and $2 million to UNHCR and UNDP to help Syrian refugees and host communities in Lebanon, having already contributed $810 million in 2015 to Syria, Iraq and neighbouring countries that hosted refugees. Japan put particular emphasis on linking humanitarian assistance and development assistance and the need for human security, in order to enable refugees and internally displaced persons, especially those in protracted situations, to become self-reliant.

45. Japan had made every effort to provide financial assistance to UNHCR, having both pledged and disbursed $180 million by the end of September 2015. It was also gradually increasing the proportion of its contribution allocated to the core budget. It welcomed the effort made by UNHCR to expand its donor base and encouraged it to explore the possibility of raising contributions from emerging donors and the private sector.

46. **Ms. Bard** (Sweden) welcomed the Office's focus on the protracted Afghan refugee situation. She stressed the need for burden-sharing and a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the current influx of refugees, which put enormous pressure on European Union countries and tested their asylum systems. At the global scale, overwhelming humanitarian needs were accompanied by a severe shortage of funds. Efforts should focus on broadening partnership with States, local actors, the development community and the private sector, while always placing the persons concerned at the heart of humanitarian measures. More efforts were also needed to address the root causes of humanitarian crises, such as conflict, violence, underdevelopment and climate change.

47. Sweden had been the Office's sixth largest donor in 2014 and its core contributions were fully non-earmarked. She called on other member States to make

more non-earmarked contributions in order to enable the Office to be more flexible and efficient. In conclusion, she said that her Government had pledged to further increase Sweden's humanitarian funding in 2016, including its funding to UNHCR.

48. **Mr. Kebret Botora** (Ethiopia) said that under its open-door policy, Ethiopia provided humanitarian assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, in line with its obligations under the United Nations and African Union conventions and protocols. Ethiopia, which currently hosted over 720,000 refugees from South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea, was the largest host country in Africa and no longer had the resources to strengthen its response capacity. He urged the Executive Committee to reconsider the proposed reduction of resources allocated to Ethiopia in the 2016/2017 budget, as such a reduction would have an adverse effect on Ethiopia's refugee support programmes.

49. His Government believed that provision of humanitarian assistance through cross-border operations could be an efficient approach to dealing with the Somali refugee situation, especially since most of South Somalia was not controlled by Al Shabaab but by the Somalian Government and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Ethiopia was willing to keep its borders open and requested all stakeholders to join the operations in order to help reduce the influx of refugees into Ethiopia. In addition, he called upon the international community to support the implementation of Addis Ababa commitments with regard to Somali refugees by supporting his Government, other host countries and the Office and by creating more resettlement opportunities.

50. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to points raised by the previous speakers, thanked the representative of Brazil for his statement and commended Brazil for its humanitarian visa policy for Syrians. He expressed appreciation for the measures recently taken by the Australian Government in relation to Syrian refugees, in particular the increased resettlement opportunities and its regional and financial support to humanitarian operations. Every effort would be made to ensure that the UNHCR resettlement service was up to the task. He praised the Liberian Government for its generosity and patience in relation to the slow voluntary repatriation of refugees from Côte d'Ivoire. The Office would do its best to restart the voluntary repatriation process. He also welcomed the protection measures recently taken by the Government of Liberia. He supported Gabon's call for a humanistic approach to the management of migrant flows and the importance it attached to cooperation in the Central African region. The Office was at Gabon's disposal in that regard. Ecuador was in the forefront of Latin America's efforts to help refugees and asylum seekers. He welcomed Ecuador's policy on refugees and migration, which also sought to address the root causes of such phenomena. The Office would be very interested in further cooperation with Ecuadorian authorities.

51. Furthermore, he praised Iran's asylum policy and, in particular, the measures taken to ensure education for all refugees and extend health insurance to the whole refugee population. The Office supported Iran's position on voluntary repatriation and appreciated its investment in Afghanistan. He regretted that only limited support had been offered in that regard by UNHCR and other actors and stressed the need to create more resettlement opportunities. Turkey, which was the largest host country in the world, played a crucial role in the international protection regime, both in terms of the quantity and the quality of assistance provided to Syrian and other refugees. Turkey's refugee camps, which had been made possible by the Government s generosity and the very large budget it had allocated, were the best in the world. He thanked the representative of Japan for her statement and said that Japan had been a strong supporter of the Office's activities. He agreed with Japan that the link between humanitarian and development assistance and the human security approach was of great importance. Sweden's contribution to UNHCR, if taken as a percentage of its

GDP or population, was, in fact, either the first or the second largest, and was always non-earmarked, which greatly facilitated UNHCR work. He thanked Sweden for its support and echoed its call for more non-earmarked funding. Ethiopia was the largest host country in Africa. Its open-door policy with regard to refugees and the measures adopted demonstrated its extreme generosity. Although the UNHCR budget for Ethiopia was currently low, it was likely to increase substantially in the following year.

52. **Mr. Staur** (Denmark) said that, as a result of UNHCR efforts, some 230,000 refugees had found a durable solution in 2014. However, he stressed the need for even greater generosity from both donors and host countries to help ensure the efficiency of UNHCR, which had to continually adjust its response to the ever changing humanitarian situation. He called on all States present to exert more influence to resolve the conflict in Syria. Political inaction had heavy costs in terms of both human lives and humanitarian needs. Moreover, the international humanitarian system was clearly close to bankruptcy and it was important to focus on fundraising, organizational efficiency and working methods.

53. UNHCR seemed to continue perceiving its partners as being responsible for implementing an agenda controlled exclusively by the Office itself. Such an approach was no longer appropriate. UNHCR should redouble its efforts to ensure that its partners shared responsibility and could develop their own approaches to dealing with displacement. He stressed that finding durable solutions should be the main objective of UNHCR work.

54. **Mr. Fasel** (Switzerland) said that the constantly growing humanitarian challenges could only be tackled through joint efforts and reinforced cooperation. Four principles were vital in responding to the humanitarian challenges, namely: reaffirming the principle of shared responsibility and burden-sharing; emphasizing and recognizing the considerable efforts made by host countries and their populations; recalling that humanitarian action could never replace the responsibility of States to protect their populations and to make every effort to find a durable solution; and ensuring the full respect for international humanitarian law, as well as human rights, in particular the obligation of parties to a conflict to spare the civilian population.

55. On 18 September 2015, the Swiss Government had made a decision to take part in the first European programme on redistribution and resettlement of 40,000 displaced persons. In addition, Switzerland was committed to supporting the establishment of a lasting and binding mechanism for the distribution of persons in need of protection. His Government had increased its assistance budget to 70 million Swiss francs in order to make an even greater contribution to the protection and assistance of refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities. One of his Government's priorities was finding a durable solution to the Syrian conflict. He reiterated his country's unfailing support for the peace process initiated by the United Nations and said that Switzerland was open to hosting new negotiations in Geneva. In conclusion, he recalled that on 12 and 13 October 2015, the Nansen Initiative Intergovernmental Global Consultation on the Protection Agenda would take place in Geneva, and that would mark the official closing of the initiative in its current form. In the future, the initiative would focus on national and regional monitoring, as well as international monitoring.

56. **Ms. Guenther** (Germany) said that although Germany's financial contributions to the UNHCR had steadily increased over the recent years, the latter urgently needed additional resources. He stressed the need for emerging powers to become aware of their growing responsibilities, and welcomed the fact that the Office was systematically broadening its donor base.

57. Assisting displaced persons at all stages of forced displacement was of vital importance in dealing with the humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian needs were particularly serious in countries of origin and so was the potential to help people. Humanitarian assistance in such countries should foster prospects of a dignified life and offer opportunities for earning a living. He stressed the importance of ensuring respect for international humanitarian law.

58. International solidarity towards countries receiving large numbers of refugees was urgently needed. On 28 October 2014, his Government had held a conference in Berlin on the Syrian refugee situation. In the Berlin Declaration adopted at that conference, the participating countries had pledged to support host countries in coping with the influx of refugees from Syria.

59. Pointing out that many transit countries were struggling to manage with the high number of refugees, he echoed the UNHCR appeal to expand all national resettlement programmes. For its part, Germany granted protection to every person being persecuted within the meaning of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Germany had received 38,000 Syrian refugees under its humanitarian programmes. In conclusion, he emphasized the importance of European solidarity and a common European approach to the refugee crisis, as well as the need to establish a permanent relocation mechanism in the European Union, which would serve as a pillar of Europe's asylum system.

60. **Mr. Manicom** (Canada) said that between 2005 and 2015, the number of persons within the competence of UNHCR had increased from about 35 million to the current record number of almost 60 million. The number of refugees had more than doubled during that period, reaching 14 million. At the same time UNHCR had to constantly deal with a lack of funds, which had merely doubled during that period, while the needs had increased by a factor of six.

61. While the war in Syria was at present a major cause of displacements, prolonged crises in South Sudan, Afghanistan, Somalia and other regions also forced millions of people to flee. Another worrying trend, however, was the growing number of refugees risking their lives at sea while States struggled to reconcile the protection of those refugees with the political and security consequences.

62. However, the scale of the challenges UNHCR faced was daunting, with unprecedented levels of displacement and a growing gap between needs and resources. Governments and development actors should make long-term investments in the development of national capacity. All too often UNHCR struggled to uphold the principles of refugee protection in the face of resistance or violations by the very States that had introduced those principles. The Executive Committee, too, was increasingly divided and struggling to live up to its humanitarian values. He stressed the need to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, giving particular attention to persons affected by armed conflicts and protracted crises.

63. Canada called on UNHCR to focus on the following strategic objectives: first ensuring that its strategies responded to the needs of refugee women and children, who made up the vast majority of those affected by displacement and remained most at risk even in host countries; second working closely with other United Nations bodies and the international community to eliminate barriers, ensure adequate resources and capacity, and find lasting solutions; and finally fearlessly and tirelessly upholding the principles of the international refugee regime, while reminding the United Nations Member States of their joint responsibility for international protection and lasting solutions. In conclusion, he pointed out that his Government was carrying out extensive reforms of its asylum system in order to improve its efficiency.

64. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to points raised by the previous four speakers, thanked the representative of Denmark for his personal as well as his Government's support for UNHCR work and his own work. He agreed that solutions were the most important objective of UNHCR activities. He recognized that there was a gap between the UNHCR vision and the numbers and expressed the hope that Denmark, which was a champion of solutions, would help the Office to transform the vision into numbers.

65. He fully agreed with the four principles of response to the current humanitarian crisis, set out by the representative of Switzerland. He emphasized Switzerland's role in the Nansen Initiative and in assisting displaced persons who had had to move as a result of climate changes and related factors. Switzerland played an important role in bridging the gap in the international protection system in that regard.

66. The recent events had clearly demonstrated the extremely important role of Germany in the refugee crisis. He thanked the German Government for supporting UNHCR activities worldwide and commended it for its political initiatives and the quality of its asylum system and resettlement programmes. He echoed its call for more European solidarity and a common European vision and the appeal to make permanent relocation a pillar of the European asylum system.

67. Lastly, he said that Canada's active participation in all the strategic debates on UNHCR programmes and reforms had had an enormous influence on the Office. He thanked Canada for its financial support and commended it for its asylum system and resettlement programmes.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.